

# **SENEGAL 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The Ambassador and embassy representatives discussed religious freedom with the government and promoted religious pluralism and dialogue among religious groups.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 13.3 million (July 2013 estimate). Approximately 94 percent of the population is Muslim. Most Muslims belong to one of several Sufi brotherhoods, each of which incorporates unique practices that reflect Islam's long history in the country. Some Muslims affiliate with Sunni or Shia reform movements. Approximately 4 percent of the population is Christian. Christian groups include Roman Catholics, Protestants, and groups combining Christian and indigenous beliefs. The remaining 2 percent exclusively adheres to indigenous religions or professes no religion.

The country is ethnically and religiously diverse. Although there is significant integration of all groups, Muslims are generally concentrated in the north while Christians largely reside in the west and south. Members of indigenous religious groups mainly live in the east and south.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The constitution specifically defines the country as a secular state and provides for the free practice of religious beliefs, provided that public order is maintained.

Muslims may choose either the civil Family Code or Islamic law to adjudicate family conflicts, such as marriage and inheritance disputes. Civil court judges

## SENEGAL

preside over civil and customary law cases, but religious leaders informally settle many disputes among Muslims, particularly in rural areas.

By law, all groups religious or otherwise, must register with the interior ministry to acquire legal status as an association. Registration enables a group to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, and receive financial contributions from private sources. Registered religious groups and nonprofit organizations are exempt from many forms of taxation.

Religious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must obtain authorization to operate from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Development. The government monitors foreign religious NGOs to determine whether their activities adhere to their stated objectives.

### Government Practices

The government generally approved applications for registration and religious groups administered their affairs without government interference.

The government provided direct financial and material assistance to religious groups, primarily to maintain or rehabilitate places of worship or to underwrite special events. All religious groups had access to these funds, and often competed to obtain them.

The government encouraged and assisted Muslim participation in the annual Hajj, providing imams with hundreds of free airplane tickets for the pilgrimage for distribution among citizens. The government provided similar assistance for an annual Roman Catholic pilgrimage to the Vatican, the Palestinian territories, and Israel.

The government allowed up to four hours of voluntary religious education per week in public elementary schools. Parents could choose either a Christian or Muslim curriculum. An estimated 700,000 students participated in religious education through the public elementary school system during the year.

Private schools also provided religious education. The education ministry provided partial funding to schools operated by religious groups that met national education standards. Established Christian schools with strong academic reputations received the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools were Muslim. In addition to the national

## SENEGAL

curriculum, Christian schools offered religious education to Christian students and moral education to non-Christians. Non-Christian students were not required to take Christian religious courses.

The government also funded a growing number of Islamic schools in which approximately 60,000 students are enrolled.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

In January unidentified vandals broke into a Christian chapel in Darou Khoudos about 50 miles away from the capital and overturned liturgical objects. Police opened an investigation into the incident. By year's end the police had not reported results from the investigation.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

Through active engagement with religious leaders, religious groups, government, and civil society, the U.S. Ambassador and embassy officials promoted and helped facilitate freedom of religion and societal respect for religious freedom. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with leaders of the main Muslim brotherhoods in the country and commended their stabilizing role. Local media coverage of these visits amplified that message.

The Ambassador also hosted an iftar that brought together major religious leaders, leaders of grassroots religious organizations, and government officials responsible for religious issues for a discussion of the importance of interfaith friendship and religious freedom.

The embassy sponsored a well-known U.S. citizen imam fluent in Arabic to visit during Ramadan. The imam spoke to several audiences in Dakar and its suburbs, including the national Islamic institute. Relating his experience as a Muslim in the United States, he also spoke of the culture of peace that Islam embraces, while encouraging the country to continue its religious harmony. The embassy also arranged a number of press opportunities for the imam to address a wider national audience through the media.